

STATE FAIR HOUSING ACT

Codified as Chapter 41A of the North Carolina General Statutes

North Carolina's "State Fair Housing Act" is reprinted here in its entirety as a service to the state's real estate licensees and applicants for licensure. This reprinting also reflects the North Carolina Real Estate Commission's commitment to the cause of promoting fair housing in this state. Real estate licensees and applicants for licensure are reminded that any conduct by a broker or salesman which violates the State Fair Housing Act constitutes a violation of the Real Estate License Law. (See G.S. 93A-6(a)(10) and Commission Rule A.1601.)

Section 41A-1. Title.— This Chapter shall be known and may be cited as the State Fair Housing Act.

Section 41A-2. Purpose.— The purpose of this Chapter is to provide fair housing throughout the State of North Carolina.

Section 41A-3. Definitions.— For the purposes of this Chapter, the following definitions apply:

- (1) The "Commission" means the North Carolina Human Relations Commission;
- (1a) "Covered multifamily dwellings" means:
 - a. A building, including all units and common use areas, in which there are four or more units if the building has one or more elevators; or
 - b. Ground floor units and ground floor common use areas in a building with four or more units.
- (1b) "Familial status" means one or more persons who have not attained the age of 18 years being domiciled with:
 - a. A parent or another person having legal custody of the person or persons; or
 - b. The designee of the parent or other person having custody, provided the designee has the written permission of the parent or other person.

The protections against discrimination on the basis of familial status shall apply to any person who is pregnant or is in the process of securing legal custody of any person who has not attained the age of 18 years.

- (2) "Family" includes a single individual;
- (3) "Financial institution" means any banking corporation or trust company, savings and loan association, credit union, insurance company, or related corporation, partnership, foundation, or other institution engaged primarily in lending or investing funds;
- (3a) "Handicapping condition" means (i) a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of a person's major life activities, (ii) a record of having such an impairment, or (iii) being regarded as having such an impairment. Handicapping condition does not include current, illegal use of or addiction to a controlled substance as defined in 21 U.S.C. §802, the Controlled Substances Act. The protections against discrimination on the basis of handicapping condition shall apply to a buyer or renter of a dwelling, a person residing in or intending to reside in the dwelling after it is sold, rented, or made available, or any person associated with the buyer or renter.
- (4) "Housing accommodation" means any improved or unimproved real property, or part

thereof, which is used or occupied, or is intended, arranged, or designed to be used or occupied, as the home or residence of one or more individuals;

- (5) "Person" means any individual, association, corporation, political subdivision, partnership, labor union, legal representative, mutual company, joint stock company, trust, trustee in bankruptcy, unincorporated organization, or other legal or commercial entity, the State, or governmental entity or agency;
- (6) "Real estate broker or salesman" means a person, whether licensed or not, who, for or with the expectation of receiving a consideration, lists, sells, purchases, exchanges, rents, or leases real property, or who negotiates or attempts to negotiate any of these activities, or who holds himself out as engaged in these activities, or who negotiates or attempts to negotiate a loan secured or to be secured by mortgage or other encumbrance upon real property, or who is engaged in the business of listing real property in a publication; or a person employed by or acting on behalf of any of these persons;
- (7) "Real estate transaction" means the sale, exchange, rental, or lease of real property;
- (8) "Real property" means a building, structure, real estate, land, tenement, leasehold, interest in real estate cooperatives, condominium, and hereditament, corporeal and incorporeal, or any interest therein.

Section 41A-4. Unlawful discriminatory housing practices.—(a) It is an unlawful discriminatory housing practice for any person in a real estate transaction, because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, handicapping condition, or familial status to:

- (1) Refuse to engage in a real estate transaction;
- (2) Discriminate against a person in the terms, conditions, or privileges of a real estate transaction or in the furnishing of facilities or services in connection therewith;
- (2a) Refuse to permit, at the expense of a handicapped person, reasonable modifications of existing premises occupied or to be occupied by the person if the modifications are necessary to the handicapped person's full enjoyment of the premises; except that, in the case of a rental unit, the landlord may, where it is reasonable to do so, condition permission for modifications on agreement by the renter to restore the interior of the premises to the condition that existed before the modifications, reasonable wear and tear excepted;
- (2b) Refuse to make reasonable accommodations in rules, policies, practices, or services, when these accommodations may be necessary to a handicapped person's equal use and enjoyment of a dwelling;
- (2c) Fail to design and construct covered multifamily dwellings available for first occupancy after March 13, 1991, so that:
 - a. The dwellings have at least one building entrance on an accessible route, unless it is impractical to do so because of terrain or unusual site characteristics; or
 - b. With respect to dwellings with a building entrance on an accessible route:
 - 1. The public and common use portions are readily accessible to and usable by handicapped persons;
 - 2. There is an accessible route into and through all dwellings and units;
 - 3. All doors designed to allow passage into, within, and through these

- 4. dwellings and individual units are wide enough for wheelchairs;
 - 4. Light switches, electrical switches, electrical outlets, thermostats, and other environmental controls are in accessible locations;
 - 5. Bathroom walls are reinforced to allow later installation of grab bars; and
 - 6. Kitchens and bathrooms have space for an individual in a wheelchair to maneuver;
- (3) Refuse to receive or fail to transmit a bona fide offer to engage in a real estate transaction;
 - (4) Refuse to negotiate for a real estate transaction;
 - (5) Represent to a person that real property is not available for inspection, sale, rental, or lease when in fact it is so available, or fail to bring a property listing to his attention, or refuse to permit him to inspect real property;
 - (6) Make, print, circulate, post, or mail or cause to be so published a statement, advertisement, or sign, or use a form or application for a real estate transaction, or make a record or inquiry in connection with a prospective real estate transaction, which indicates directly or indirectly, an intent to make a limitation, specification, or discrimination with respect thereto;
 - (7) Offer, solicit, accept, use, or retain a listing of real property with the understanding that any person may be discriminated against in a real estate transaction or in the furnishing of facilities or services in connection therewith; or
 - (8) Otherwise make unavailable or deny housing.

(b) Repealed.

(b1) It is an unlawful discriminatory housing practice for any person or other entity whose business includes engaging in residential real estate related transactions to discriminate against any person in making available such a transaction, or in the terms and conditions of such a transaction, because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, handicapping condition, or familial status. As used in this subsection, "residential real estate related transaction" means:

- (1) The making or purchasing of loans or providing financial assistance (i) for purchasing, constructing, improving, repairing, or maintaining a dwelling, or (ii) where the security is residential real estate; or
- (2) The selling, brokering, or appraising of residential real estate.

The provisions of this subsection shall not prohibit any financial institution from using a loan application which inquires into a person's financial and dependent obligations or from basing its actions on the income or financial abilities of any person.

(c) It is an unlawful discriminatory housing practice for a person to induce or attempt to induce another to enter into a real estate transaction from which such person may profit:

- (1) By representing that a change has occurred, or may or will occur in the composition of the residents of the block, neighborhood, or area in which the real property is located with respect to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, handicapping condition, or familial status of the owners or occupants; or
- (2) By representing that a change has resulted, or may or will result in the lowering of property values, an increase in criminal or antisocial behavior, or a decline in the quality of schools in the block, neighborhood, or area in which the real property is located.

(d) It is an unlawful discriminatory housing practice to deny any person who is otherwise qualified by State law access to or membership or participation in any real estate brokers' organization, multiple listing service, or other service, organization, or facility relating to the business of engaging in real estate transactions, or to discriminate in the terms or conditions of such access, membership, or participation because of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, handicapping condition, or familial status.

(e) It is an unlawful discriminatory housing practice to coerce, intimidate, threaten, or interfere with any person in the exercise or enjoyment of, on account of having exercised or enjoyed, or on account of having aided or encouraged any other person in the exercise or enjoyment of any right granted or protected by this Chapter.

Section 41A-5. Proof of violation.—(a) It is a violation of this Chapter if:

- (1) A person by his act or failure to act intends to discriminate against a person. A person intends to discriminate if, in committing an unlawful discriminatory housing practice described in G.S. 41A-4 he was motivated in full, or in any part at all, by race, color, religion, sex, national origin, handicapping condition, or familial status. An intent to discriminate may be established by direct or circumstantial evidence; or
- (2) A person's act or failure to act has the effect, regardless of intent, of discriminating, as set forth in G.S. 41A-4, against a person of a particular race, color, religion, sex, national origin, handicapping condition, or familial status. However, it is not a violation of this Chapter if a person whose action or inaction has an unintended discriminatory effect, proves that his action or inaction was motivated and justified by business necessity.

(b) It shall be no defense to a violation of this Chapter that the violation was requested, sought, or otherwise procured by another person.

Section 41A-6. Exemptions.—(a) The provisions of G.S. 41 A-4 except for subdivision (a)(6), do not apply to the following:

- (1) The rental of a housing accommodation in a building which contains housing accommodations for not more than four families living independently of each other, if the lessor or a member of his family resides in one of the housing accommodations;
- (2) The rental of a room or rooms in a private house, not a boarding house, if the lessor or a member of his family resides in the house;
- (3) Religious institutions or organizations or charitable or educational organizations operated, supervised, or controlled by religious institutions or organizations which give preference to members of the same religion in a real estate transaction, as long as membership in such religion is not restricted by race, color, sex, national origin, handicapping condition, or familial status;
- (4) Private clubs, not in fact open to the public, which incident to their primary purpose or purposes provide lodging, which they own or operate for other than a commercial purpose, to their members or give preference to their members;
- (5) With respect to discrimination based on sex, the rental or leasing of housing accommodations in single-sex dormitory property;
- (6) Repealed.
- (7) The sale, rental, exchange, or lease of commercial real estate. For the purposes of this

Chapter, commercial real estate means real property which is not intended for residential use.

(b) No provision of this Chapter requires that a dwelling be made available to a person whose tenancy would constitute a direct threat to the health or safety of other persons or whose tenancy would result in substantial physical damage to the property of others.

(c) No provision of this Chapter limits the applicability of any reasonable local or State restrictions regarding the maximum number of occupants permitted to occupy a dwelling unit.

(d) Nothing in this Chapter shall be deemed to nullify any provisions of the North Carolina Building Code applicable to the construction of residential housing for the handicapped.

(e) No provision of this Chapter regarding familial status applies with respect to housing for older persons. "Housing for older persons" means housing:

- (1) Provided under any State or federal program specifically designed and operated to assist elderly persons as defined in the program;
- (2) Intended for and solely occupied by person 62 years or older. Housing satisfies the requirements of this subdivision even though there are persons residing in such housing on September 13, 1988, who are under 62 years of age, provided that all new occupants after September 13, 1988, are 62 years or older; or
- (3) Intended for and operated for occupancy by at least one person 55 years of age or older per unit as shown by such factors as (i) the existence of significant facilities and services specifically designed to meet the physical and social needs of older persons or, if this is not practicable, that the housing provides important housing opportunities for older persons, (ii) at least eighty percent (80%) of the units are occupied by at least one person 55 years of age or older per unit; and (iii) the publication of and adherence to policies and procedures which demonstrate an intent by the owner or manager to provide housing for persons 55 years or older. Housing satisfies the requirements of this subdivision even though on September 13, 1988, under eighty percent (80%) of the units in the housing facility are occupied by at least one person 55 years or older per unit, provided that eighty percent (80%) of the units that are occupied by new tenants after September 13, 1988, are occupied by at least one person 55 years or older per unit until such time as eighty percent (80%) of all the units in the housing facility are occupied by at least one person 55 years or older. Housing facilities newly constructed for first occupancy after March 12, 1989, shall satisfy the requirements of this subdivision if (i) when twenty-five percent (25%) of the units are occupied, eighty percent (80%) of the occupied units are occupied by at least one person 55 years or older, and thereafter (ii) eighty percent (80%) of all newly occupied units are occupied by at least one person 55 years or older until such time as eighty percent (80%) of all the units in the housing facility are occupied by at least one person 55 years of age or older.

Housing satisfies the requirements of subdivisions (2) and (3) of this subsection even though there are units occupied by employees of the housing facility who are under the minimum age or family members of the employees residing in the same unit who are under the minimum age, provided the employees perform substantial duties directly related to the management of the housing.

Section 41A-7. Enforcement.—(a) Any person who claims to have been injured by an unlawful

discriminatory housing practice or who reasonably believes that he will be irrevocably injured by an unlawful discriminatory housing practice may file a complaint with the North Carolina Human Relations Commission. Complaints shall be in writing, shall state the facts upon which the allegation of an unlawful discriminatory housing practice is based, and shall contain such other information and be in such form as the Commission requires. Commission employees shall assist complainants in reducing complaints to writing and shall assist in setting forth the information in the complaint as may be required by the Commission. Within 10 days after receipt of the complaint, the Director of the Commission shall serve on the respondent a copy of the complaint and a notice advising the respondent of his procedural rights and obligations under this Chapter. Within 10 days after receipt of the complaint, the Director of the Commission shall serve on the complainant a notice acknowledging the filing of the complaint and informing the complainant of his time limits and choice of forums under this Chapter.

No complaint may be filed with the Commission under this section during any period in which the Commission is not certified by the Secretary of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development in accordance with 42 U.S.C. § 3610 (f) to have jurisdiction over the subject matter of the complaint. Provided, however, that during any such period in which the Commission is not certified, any person who claims to have been injured by an unlawful discriminatory practice or who reasonably believes that he will be irrevocably injured by an unlawful discriminatory housing practice may bring a civil action directly in superior court in accordance with the provisions of subsection (j) of this section, except that any such civil action shall be commenced within one year after the occurrence or termination of the alleged unlawful discriminatory housing practice.

(b) A complaint under subsection (a) shall be filed within one year after the alleged unlawful discriminatory housing practice occurred. A respondent may file an answer to the complaint against him within 10 days after receiving a copy of the complaint. With the leave of the Commission, which shall be granted whenever it would be reasonable and fair to do so, the complaint and the answer may be amended at any time. Complaints and answers shall be verified. The Commission shall make final administrative disposition of a complaint within one year of the date the complaint is filed, unless it is impracticable to do so. If the Commission is unable to do so, it shall notify the complainant and respondent, in writing, of the reasons for not doing so.

(c) Whenever another agency of the State or any other unit of government of the State has jurisdiction over the subject matter of any complaint filed under this section, and such agency or unit of government has legal authority equivalent to or greater than the authority under this Chapter to investigate or act upon the complaint, the Commission shall be divested of jurisdiction over such complaint. The Commission shall, within 30 days, notify the agency or unit of government of the apparent unlawful discriminatory housing practice, and request that the complaint be investigated in accordance with such authority.

(d) Complaints may be resolved at any time by informal conference, conciliation, or persuasion. Nothing said or done in the course of such informal procedure may be made public by the Commission or used as evidence in a subsequent proceeding under this Chapter without the written consent of the person concerned.

(e) Within 30 days after the filing of the complaint, the Commission shall commence an investigation of the complaint to ascertain the facts relating to the alleged unlawful discriminatory housing practice. If the complaint is not resolved before the investigation is complete, upon completion of the investigation, the Commission shall determine whether or not there are reasonable grounds to believe that an unlawful discriminatory housing practice has occurred. The Commission shall make a

determination within 90 days after the filing of the complaint. If the Commission is unable to complete the investigation and issue a determination within 90 days after the filing of the complaint, the Commission shall notify the complainant and respondent in writing of the reasons for not doing so. If the Commission concludes at any time following the filing of a complaint under this section that prompt judicial action is necessary to carry out the purposes of this Chapter, the Commission may commence a civil action for, and the court may grant, appropriate temporary or preliminary relief pending final disposition of the complaint. Any temporary restraining order or other order granting preliminary or temporary relief shall be issued in accordance with G.S. 1A-1, et seq., Rules of Civil Procedure. The commencement of a civil action under this subsection does not affect the continuation of the Commission's investigation or the initiation of a separate civil action pursuant to other subsections of this section.

(f) If the Commission finds no reasonable ground to believe that an unlawful discriminatory housing practice has occurred or is about to occur it shall dismiss the complaint and issue to the complainant a right-to-sue letter which will enable him to bring a civil action in superior court in accordance with the provisions of subsection (j) of this section.

(g) If the Commission finds reasonable grounds to believe that an unlawful discriminatory housing practice has occurred or is about to occur it shall proceed to try to eliminate or correct the discriminatory housing practice by informal conference, conciliation, or persuasion. Each conciliation agreement arising out of conciliation efforts by the Commission, whether reached before or after the Commission makes a determination of the complaint pursuant to subsection (e), shall be:

- (1) An agreement between the respondent and the complainant and shall be subject to the approval of the Commission. The Commission may also be a party to such conciliation agreements; and
- (2) Made public unless the complainant and respondent otherwise agree, and the Commission determines that disclosure is not required to further the purposes of this Chapter.

(h) If the Commission is unable to resolve the alleged unlawful discriminatory housing practice it shall notify the parties in writing that conciliation efforts have failed.

(i) A complainant may make a written request to the Commission for a right-to-sue letter:

- (1) Within 10 days following the receipt of a notice of conciliation failure; or
- (2) After 130 days following the filing of a complaint, if the Commission has not issued a notice of conciliation failure.

Upon receipt of a timely request, the Commission shall issue to the complainant a right-to-sue letter which will enable him to bring a civil action in superior court in accordance with the provisions of subsection (j) of this section.

(j) A civil action brought by a complainant pursuant to subsections (f) or (i) of this section shall be commenced within one year after the right-to-sue letter is issued. The court may grant relief, as it deems appropriate, including any permanent or temporary injunction, temporary restraining order, or other order, and may award to the plaintiff, actual and punitive damages, and may award court costs, and reasonable attorney's fees to the prevailing party. Provided, however, that a prevailing respondent may be awarded court costs and reasonable attorney's fees only upon a showing that the case is frivolous, unreasonable, or without foundation.

(k) After the Commission has issued a notice of conciliation failure pursuant to subsection (h) of this section, if the complainant does not request a right-to-sue letter pursuant to subsection (i) of this section, the complainant, the respondent, or the Commission may elect to have the claims and issues

asserted in the reasonable grounds determination decided in a civil action commenced and maintained by the Commission.

- (1) An election for a civil action under this subsection shall be made no later than 20 days after an electing complainant or respondent receives the notice of conciliation failure, or if the Commission makes the election, not more than 20 days after the notice of conciliation failure is issued. A complainant or respondent who makes an election for a civil action pursuant to this subsection shall give notice to the Commission. If the Commission makes an election, it shall notify all complainants and respondents of the election.
- (2) If an election is made under this subsection, no later than 60 days after the election is made the Commission shall commence a civil action in superior court in its own name on behalf of the complainant. In such an action, the Commission shall be represented by an attorney employed by the Commission, and G.S. 114-2 shall not apply.

In a civil action brought under this subsection, the court may grant relief as it deems appropriate, including any permanent or temporary injunction, temporary restraining order, or other equitable relief and may award to any person aggrieved by an unlawful discriminatory housing practice compensatory and punitive damages. Parties to a civil action brought pursuant to this Chapter shall have the right to a jury trial as provided for by the North Carolina Rules of Civil Procedure.

(l) After the Commission has issued a notice of conciliation failure pursuant to subsection (h) of this section, if the complainant does not request a right-to-sue letter pursuant to subsection (i) of this section, and if an election for a civil action is not made pursuant to subsection (k) of this section, the Commission shall apply to the Director of the Office of Administrative Hearings for the designation of an administrative law judge to preside at a hearing of the case. Upon receipt of the application, the Director of the Office of Administrative Hearings shall, without undue delay, assign an administrative law judge to hear the case.

- (1) All hearings shall be conducted pursuant to the provisions of Article 3A of Chapter 150B of the General Statutes, except that the case in support of the complaint shall be presented at the hearing by the Commission's attorney or agent, and G.S. 114-2 shall not apply. The parties to the complaint shall otherwise be given an opportunity to participate in the hearing as provided in G.S. 150B-40(a).
- (2) The administrative law judge assigned to hear a case pursuant to this subsection shall sit in place of the Commission and shall have the authority of a presiding officer in a contested case under Article 3A of Chapter 150B of the General Statutes. The administrative law judge shall make a proposal for decision, which shall contain proposed findings of fact, proposed conclusions of law, and proposed relief, if appropriate. The Commission may make its final decision only after carefully reviewing and considering the administrative law judge's proposal for decision, and after a copy of that proposal for decision is served on the parties and an opportunity is given each party to file exceptions and proposed findings of fact and to present oral and written arguments to the Commission.
- (3) The Commission's final decision may be made by a panel consisting of three Commission members appointed by the chairperson of the Commission. If the Commission, in its final decision, finds that a respondent has violated or is about to violate this Chapter, it may order such relief as may be appropriate, including payment to the

complainant by the respondent of compensatory damages and injunctive or other equitable relief. The Commission's order may also assess a civil penalty against the respondent:

- a. In an amount not exceeding ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) if the respondent has not been adjudged to have committed any prior unlawful discriminatory housing practices;
- b. In an amount not exceeding twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) if the respondent has been adjudged to have committed one other unlawful discriminatory housing practice during the five-year period ending on the date of the filing of the complaint; or
- c. In an amount not exceeding fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000) if the respondent has been adjudged to have committed two or more unlawful discriminatory housing practices during the seven-year period ending on the date of the filing of the complaint.

If the acts constituting the unlawful discriminatory housing practice that is the object of the complaint are committed by the same natural person who has been previously adjudged to have committed acts constituting an unlawful discriminatory housing practice, then the civil penalties set forth in sub-subdivisions b and c of this subsection may be imposed without regard to the period of time within which any subsequent discriminatory housing practice occurred.

The clear proceeds of civil penalties assessed pursuant to this subdivision shall be remitted to the Civil Penalty and Forfeiture Fund in accordance with G.S. 115C-457.2.

(m) Any person aggrieved by the final agency decision following a hearing may petition for judicial review in accordance with the provisions of G. S. 150B-43 through G.S. 150B-52. The court in a review proceeding may:

- (1) Affirm, modify, or reverse the Commission's decision in accordance with G.S. 150B-51;
- (2) Remand the case to the Commission for further proceedings;
- (3) Grant to any party such temporary relief, restraining order, or other order as it deems appropriate; or
- (4) Issue an order to enforce the Commission's order to the extent that the order is affirmed or modified.

(n) If, within 30 days after service on the parties of the Commission's decision and order following a hearing, no party has petitioned for judicial review, the Commission or the person entitled to relief may file with the clerk of superior court in the county where the unlawful discriminatory housing practice occurred, or in the county where the real property is located, a certified copy of the Commission's final order. Upon such a filing, the clerk of the court shall enter an order enforcing the Commission's final order.

Section 41A-8. Investigations; subpoenas.—(a) In conducting an investigation, the Commission shall have access at all reasonable times to premises, records, documents, individuals, and other evidence or possible sources of evidence and may examine, record, and copy such materials and take and record the testimony or statements of such persons as are reasonably necessary for the furtherance of the investigation: Provided, however, that the Commission first complies with the provisions of the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution relating to unreasonable searches and seizures.

(b) The Commission may issue subpoenas to compel access to or the production of such materials, or the appearance of such persons, and may issue interrogatories to a respondent, to the same extent and subject to the same limitations as would apply if the subpoenas or interrogatories were issued or served in aid of a civil action in the general court of justice.

(c) Upon written application of the Commission, a respondent shall be entitled to the issuance of a reasonable number of subpoenas subject to the same limitations as subpoenas issued by the Commission. Subpoenas issued at the request of a respondent shall show on their face the name and address of such respondent and shall state that they were issued at his request.

(d) In case of contumacy or refusal to obey a subpoena, the Commission or the respondent may petition for its enforcement in the superior court for the district in which the person to whom the subpoena was addressed resides, was served, or transacts business.

Section 41A-9: Repealed

Section 41A-10. Venue.— All civil actions shall be commenced in the county where the alleged unlawful discriminatory housing practices occurred, or in the county where the real property is located.